

Texas Drought

Drought approaches worst in history

With the extreme hot and dry weather showing no signs of relenting, LCRA forecasts that this drought could become the worst on record by early spring.

Given this forecast, LCRA's Board of Directors decided Sept. 21 to ask the state for permission to significantly curtail or cut off water for downstream agricultural use next year if the levels of lakes Buchanan and Travis remain low. You can read more about that decision [here](#).

The 11 months from October 2010 through August 2011 have been the driest for that 11-month period in Texas since 1895, when the state began keeping rainfall records. This summer in Texas has been the hottest in the country's history, according to the [National Weather Service](#).

These historically hot and dry conditions have reduced the flow of water in the tributaries that feed the Highland Lakes, the region's water supply reservoirs, to a trickle. From January through August, the amount of water flowing into the lakes, called inflows, has been less than 10 percent of average. Inflows for June, July and August are less than one percent of average, making that three-month period the lowest for inflows of any three months in recorded history. September is on track to be the lowest single month for inflows on record, and 2011 is on pace to have the lowest inflows of any year in history.

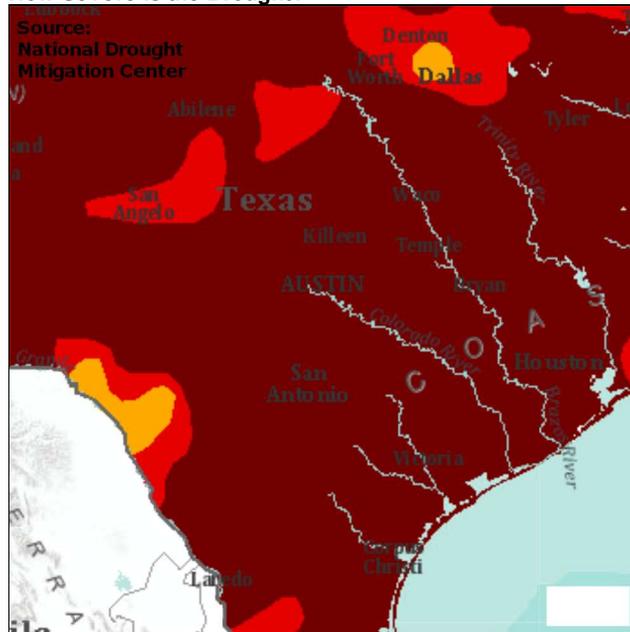
These record-low inflows coupled with high evaporation and high water use from the lakes by customers means that the combined storage of lakes Travis and Buchanan could drop to 640,000 to 680,000 acre-feet by January 1, according to new forecasts. This would move the lakes very close to the 600,000 acre-foot level that would trigger a declaration that conditions are worse than during the worst drought in the state's history, the 10-year drought of the 1940s and 50s.

If water supply levels reach 600,000 acre-feet next year, LCRA's Board would take action to cut off water from the Highland Lakes to downstream farmers and work with municipal and industrial customers to reduce their use by 20 percent, according to the current Water Management Plan. But the Board's [Sept. 21 decision](#) could mean that farmers are cut off next year before the lakes reach 600,000 acre-feet.

The weather forecast for our basin does not bring much relief because a drier than normal weather pattern looks to continue. Barring a potential tropical storm, no significant rain is expected. A weak to moderate La Nina is forecast to be in place this fall and winter. As a result, rainfall is forecast to be below normal at least through late winter. While some rain is projected, it is not expected to be of the magnitude to have a significant effect on the ongoing drought.

Lakes Buchanan and Travis are expected to continue to fall at least a foot a week until October. The following table shows current conditions at lakes Travis and Buchanan along with projected conditions through 2011 as compared to the conditions experienced during the 2009 drought.

How Severe is the Drought?



Use your mouse to zoom in or out or move the map.

- Intensity:**
- D0 Abnormally Dry
 - D1 Drought - Moderate
 - D2 Drought - Severe
 - D3 Drought - Extreme
 - D4 Drought - Exceptional

The [U.S Drought Monitor](#) each week classifies the intensity of dry conditions throughout the United States.

HOW FULL ARE THE LAKES?

37%

Lakes Travis and Buchanan are our region's water supply reservoirs.

BOB ROSE'S WEATHER BLOG



RIVERS AND LAKES

LAKE	LEVEL	MO. AVG
Buchanan	988.04	1011.35
Inks	887.33	887.50
LBJ	824.72	824.03
Marble Falls	736.29	736.06
Travis	628.41	666.20
Austin	492.09	492.18

[Daily River Report](#) | [Hydromet Data](#)

USEFUL LINKS

- [Water Use Restrictions](#)
- [Frequently Asked Questions about drought](#)
- [Public Boat Ramp Information](#)
- [Safe Boating](#)
- [U.S. Seasonal Drought Outlook](#)



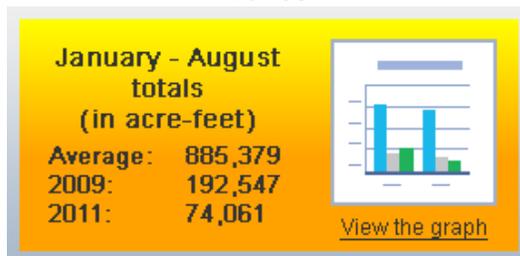
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Water flowing into the Highland Lakes



	Sept. 13, 2011	Jan. 1, 2012*	Fall 2009 (lowest point)
Lake Travis (feet above mean sea level (ft msl))	632.19 (32.5 feet below monthly average)	622-624	629.83
Lake Buchanan (ft msl)	990.38 (20.4 feet below monthly average)	982-984	989.86
Combined Storage of lakes Buchanan and Travis (million acre-feet) / % of capacity	0.82 / 41%	0.64-0.68 32%-34%	0.79 39%

*Based on persistent extremely dry conditions and La Nina in fall and winter.

Boat Ramps

As the levels in lakes Travis and Buchanan have dropped, public boat ramps have closed accordingly. As of September 19, Lake Buchanan and Lake Travis have no public boat ramps open. Public boat ramps remain open on Inks Lake, Lake LBJ, and Lake Marble Falls.

Water Management

LCRA manages lakes Travis and Buchanan, the region's water supply reservoirs, through its state-approved Water Management Plan. The plan is designed to ensure that cities and industries have the water they need during a drought equal to the worst drought our region has experienced, the 10-year drought of the 1940-50s. However, with conditions on their way to potentially being worse than during the drought of the 1940s and 1950s, LCRA will ask the state for permission to deviate from the Water Management Plan to take [extra drought relief measures](#) if dry conditions persist next year.

LCRA is working hard with all its customers to manage the water efficiently. For example, the City of Austin, Travis County Water Control and Improvement District (WCID) 17 and Travis County WCID Point Ventures are allowing only once-a-week watering. The cities of Horseshoe Bay, Cedar Park, Pflugerville, Leander, Granite Shoals and Marble Falls, as well as Kingsland Water Supply Corporation, River Place Municipal Utility District and others are limiting watering to twice a week. Other customers are implementing similar restrictions.

Individual customers can go [here](#) for information about watering restrictions recommended or required by the region's retail utilities.

All LCRA water systems, except Lometa, are in Stage 2 restrictions, which limits outdoor watering to twice a week. Lometa is in Stage 3 restrictions and watering is only permitted with hand-held hoses, hand-held buckets or drip irrigation.

LCRA also is working with its downstream agricultural customers to ensure water is being used efficiently. LCRA is encouraging farmers to use groundwater and LCRA has leased some groundwater wells to supplement the water from the Colorado River. LCRA has stopped new contracts for row and hay crops and will not provide water from the Highland Lakes for duck ponds this year.

LCRA also recently implemented a new rate structure for agricultural customers to help encourage conservation. The new rate structure charges up to triple the regular rate if farmers use excessive amounts of water. LCRA forecasts that the water available to downstream farmers will be cut back significantly next year if the drought continues.

LCRA's Team WaterSmart is visiting neighborhoods to help homeowners learn how to water their yards more efficiently. More than 1 million people rely on water from the Colorado River and Highland Lakes. Water is valuable every day, but especially during the exceptional drought our region is experiencing. Everyone can help by following simple tips to save water. Visit www.watersmart.org for more information or to [sign up](#) for a free irrigation system checkup.

TAKE A LOOK: See what the future may hold for lakes Travis and Buchanan



Lake Travis
Forecast



Lake Buchanan
Forecast



Highland Lakes
Water Storage and Forecast



Water Supply
Status

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— Updated on October 3, 2011 at 03:51 PM —

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